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THE BOOK-PLATES OF MUSICIANS AND MUSIC-LOVERS

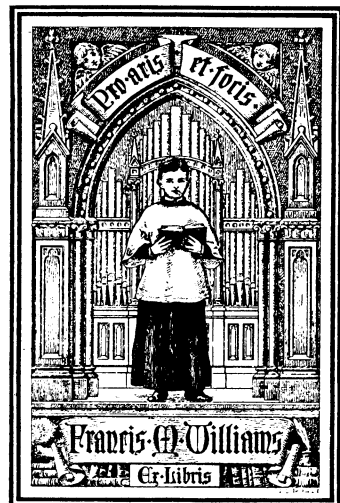
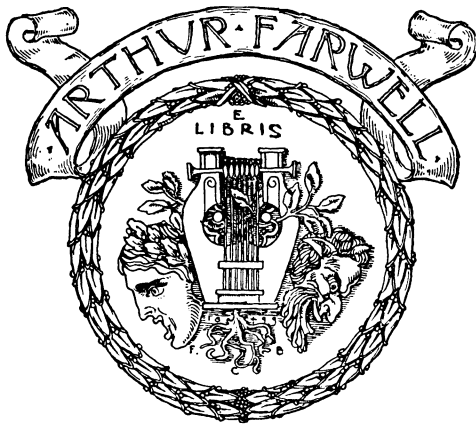
By SHELDON CHENEY

IF one has a passion for music, it is likely to color every activity of one's life. Friendships naturally are formed with people of the same tastes, and business associations may be largely molded by the influences of one's leisure hour hobbies. And certainly the books of the music-lover's library will bulk large on the *musicana* side. When love of music thus so often determines the larger aspects of life, it should be no matter for wonder that such a personal little thing as the book-plate again and again reflects that love.

The book-plate, designed primarily as a label to indicate book ownership, was for centuries stiffly heraldic in character. Of recent years it has become, instead, a sort of pictorial coat-of-arms, a graphic index to the tastes of the owner. For the man whose hobbies are primarily bookish, it will probably be purely literary; for the nature lover it may be a landscape; for the boy or girl, a childish bit of sentiment; for the actor, a reminder of the stage; for the architect, a famous building, or a beautiful bit of architectural detail; and finally, for the musician or music-lover, it must, in all appropriateness, be suggestive of the art of music.

During the last quarter-century the book-plate, through its two-fold appeal, artistic and antiquarian, has become a thing much prized by art connoisseurs and antiquarians, as well as an object of interest to the general reading public. There are in America two active associations of collectors and designers of book-plates, and each of the important European countries has its "*ex libris*" society and its monthly or quarterly journal devoted to book-plate matters. The latest bibliography lists over six hundred books and pamphlets on the subject, to say nothing of a great number of magazine essays. And the interest, especially on the artistic side, seems to be still growing.

When a subject is so large, spanning, as this one does, all the centuries of art from Dürer to Abbey, and reflecting the



tastes of all the intervening generations of book-lovers, it is only natural that collectors should single out certain classes of plates for particular study. Thus one collector may gather only the book-plates of famous authors, another only angling plates, another only heraldic plates, another only garden plates, and so on. But of all the specialties so pursued there is none more fascinating than the book-plates of musicians and music-lovers. Indeed, so great is the interest that has been shown in this particular subdivision of the subject, that in Europe three books have been published specifically about musical book-plates.

The music-lover has utilized every conceivable method of bringing some suggestion of his art into book-plate design. The range extends from the most symbolic to the most realistic, from the most elaborate to the simplest, and from the oppressively serious to the annoyingly frivolous. Musical instruments decoratively treated, piping Pans and piping nymphs, bits of musical notation, portraits of famous musicians, choir boys, Cupids playing the violin, musical angels of enlightenment—these appear again and again in the collectors' albums. And of course that time worn symbol of the art, the lyre, is quite as common as the very modern lady languishing at the piano. How cleverly these stock subjects have been varied, and adapted to individual tastes and needs, the accompanying illustrations will show. They have been chosen from a collection of more than four thousand plates; and although reduced in size, they are representative of the best that has been used to label the personal libraries of music-lovers.

Of the purely symbolic and conventional type, one of the most interesting examples is the design used by Arthur Farwell, one of the best-known figures in the American world of music. Within a formal wreath the lyre properly takes the central place. Beside it are the conventional symbols of the art of the theatre, the masks of tragedy and comedy. Above is a ribbon bearing the name. The decorative heavy line used in the execution of this design is especially suited to the requirements of a book-plate. It is characteristic of all the work of the designer, Frank Chouteau Brown, a Boston architect who has made more book-plates for people of musical note than any four or five other American artists together.

A second plate whereon this designer has used the lyre to symbolize musical art is that made for Gertrude L. Hale. Here the human note is introduced in the girl's head, but the central and emphatic impression is that of the instrument. Again the handling of the lines is such that the whole makes a very decorative

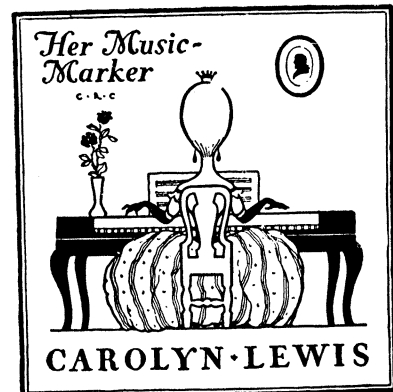
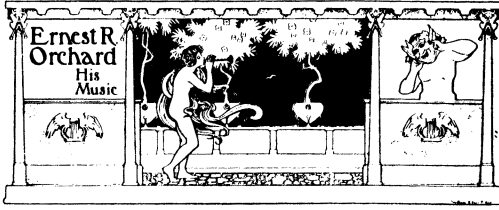
label. The owner of the plate, as one might guess, is a musician—in this case a singer.

A plate similar in theme, but very different in handling, is that of Edna B. Stockhouse. Delicacy and grace, rather than solidity and directness, characterize this attractive little design. The child-figure, with vine-crowned head, is appealing in its youthfulness, and the old-fashioned lyre seems very much in the spirit of the whole design. William Edgar Fisher, one of the best known American book-plate artists, was the designer.

Of all the "Piping Pan" book-plates—and the motive is not at all uncommon—there is none more charming than the "A. A. B." design. The child Pan sits on the bank of a reed-grown stream, and pipes the notes from a sheet of music propped against a tree. From the branches above hangs a name-panel with the initials. The design was made by Frank T. Merrill, and is used in the Allen A. Brown collection of music, at the Boston Public Library.

For Harvey Worthington Loomis, long famous as a composer, F. C. Brown has made a design which shows nothing of the Piping Pan except a portion of his face. By way of contrast one may compare this with the Ernest R. Orchard design, by William Edgar Fisher. Here a nymph has taken the place of Pan, and one can see quite all there is of the graceful piper. Over at one side a Satyr—or perhaps it is Pan himself—takes delight in stopping up his ears. The musical idea is further emphasized by the two winged lyres, and by the piping grotesques at the tops of the columns.

The little Tanisse Barnes Tyler plate, a third design by William Edgar Fisher, is one of the most pleasing of all the posterisque book-plates by American designers. There is no depth of thought back of the design, and the whole affair is slight indeed if one sets up an intellectual criterion. But the artist has done a thing which seems to be the most difficult of all for the average American designer to achieve: he has taken a subject so obvious that it can carry little interest in itself, and he has made an attractive bit of decoration merely by a clever placing of the few simple elements in relation to each other. It is primarily an effective arrangement of black and white, and only secondarily a picture of a girl at a piano. To be sure, it is the latter point that makes the design eminently suitable for use in the library of a music-lover; but it is the decorative quality that lifts it above the average run of American book-plates of the musical or any other class.





It will be noted that this Barnes design bears the inscription "her music," instead of the usual "ex libris" or her "book." The size and shape further emphasize the fact that this is meant to be a marker not only for books, but for sheet music. It is small enough to be pasted on the cover margin. Thus it serves to record ownership of loose music by a decorative addition to the cover, instead of the usual disfiguring signature—just as the larger book-plate ornamentally labels the books in the library, and at the same time saves their title-pages from the defacement of a carelessly written inscription. The music-lover who is the prospective owner of a design will do well to consider thoroughly this matter of the size of the plate and its wording. Mr. Fisher alone among the prominent designers seems to have grasped the idea. Reference to the Orchard and Stockhouse plates, already described, will show that they, too, have been executed with sheet music in mind.

Another example of the purely decorative treatment of instrument and player is shown in the Iustus Haarmann plate. Here a mandolin player and his book of music, with the streamers and ornamental lettering, form a satisfying design. The workmanship is rough, when one looks closely, but the total impression is unusually effective. The artist is Willi Geiger, a German who has done some of the weirdest book-plates known to collectors, as well as a number of such delightful bits as this Haarmann design.

More conventional, and less successful perhaps, is the Rubie LaLande de Ferriere plate. The violin from which the curious tree grows, and the notes in the branches, leave no doubt that the owner's concern is primarily with music. Such heavy clean-cut line work is exceptionally well suited to book-plates. But the maker's sense of design is in no way comparable to that of Geiger and others of the artists so far mentioned.

An unusual variation of the instrument and player idea is embodied in the little Robert Gable plate. The design was made for a student of music, who "played the drum" in a high school orchestra. It shows an imp of Satan beating a gong—evidently the artist's idea of student music. The plate was designed and cut on wood by George Wolfe Plank, the most imaginative of all American book-plate designers.

The plate used by Frederick W. Bancroft leaves no doubt that the owner is a lover of both music and nature. The man lies full length in the grass, with book closed, and listens with evident pleasure to the singing birds in the branches above. And to

leave no doubt about the sentiment, both music and words are given: "Summer is a-coming in, Loudly sing cuck-oo." This use of a favorite strain of music in actual notation on the plate has occurred more than once on American designs, and is even commoner among those of European music-lovers.

The use of portraits of eminent musicians in book-plate design seems to be curiously restricted in this country, not one satisfying example appearing in a collection of more than four thousand prints. But in Europe, and especially in Germany, this is one of the favorite ways of indicating the owner's musical tastes. Indeed a whole book has been written about "Beethoven Ex Libris." Among the illustrations of this essay the only example in which a composer is shown is the August F. Ammann plate. Even here the Mozart bust in its shrine is not the main motive of the plate. The remarkably dressed woman playing the piano, and the Cupid with violin, both go to impress the beholder with the owner's musical propensities. The plate is typical of the delicacy and fantasy in the work of Franz von Bayros, the leader among Austrian book-plate designers.

In the Francis M. Williams design, by Ludwig S. Ipsen, the musical idea is doubly expressed. The central motive is the choir boy, in surplice and with hymn-book. The background shows an organ in an architectural setting. It is hardly necessary to add that the owner is by profession an organist.

Unique among the musical book-plates is that made by William Edgar Fisher for Florence O'Neill. The artist has taken his inspiration from that poem in which Poe describes the angel Israfel, mentioned in the Koran as having the sweetest voice of all God's creatures:

In Heaven a spirit doth dwell
Whose heart-strings are a lute;
None sing so wildly well
As the angel Israfel,
And the giddy stars (so legends tell)
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell
Of his voice, all mute.

In embodying the spirit of music in the figure of Israfel, the designer has expressed something of that aspiring and uplifting quality of the art, which is as difficult to put in words as to portray in a drawing. Appropriately, the only detail outside the central panel is a lyre, with wreath intertwined, below the name.

Occasionally it happens that a well known musician adopts a book-plate without any reminder of the art, whereon the lyre



Robert B. Gable

and the girl-at-the-piano, and the other familiar motives, are forsaken for something quite alien to the musical world. Designs so chosen, without reference to the ruling passion of the owners' lives, may be of interest for various reasons; but usually they remind one of opportunities missed. Two of the plates shown herewith, both by F. C. Brown, were made for composers, and without any hint of musical tastes. The plate for H. F. Gilbert is merely a decorative arrangement of the name with an old-time mask. The plate of Homer A. Norris, equally well known as composer, organist, and writer about music, is more or less of a caricature. It shows a page bringing an overflowing armful of books, with the explanatory and unusual wording: "Returning books to Homer A. Norris."

When the book-plate is used only in music books the ownership inscription is sometimes changed from the usual "ex libris," to indicate the nature of the special collection. The deFerriere design is worded "ex libris musicis," which seems to be the commonest way of expressing "from the music books." "Ex musicis" is similarly used. But the "e cantibus" of the Haarmann plate expresses the same thing more pleasingly. One sometimes wonders, though, why so many people forsake plain English for the sake of a Latin phrase that has no advantage except that it "is the usual thing." After all, "Jane Smith—her music" expresses all that is necessary, simply and directly. An interesting variation is found in the plate of Carolyn Lewis, by Charles R. Capon, which is shown herewith. The inscription is in the form "her music-marker."

In European countries the book-plate has served as a place for many music-lovers to record their favorite mottoes. J. F. Verster, in his monograph on musical ex libris, quotes more than three hundred mottoes found on this class of plates. Of the designs shown here, only that of Francis M. Williams has a motto: "Pro aris et focus," or "For our altars and our firesides." This of course would be as appropriate on a non-musical plate. A more direct sentiment, from the plate of Samuel Reay, is "Laetitiae comes, dolori medicina, musica" (Music, the companion of joy, the cure for pain). A German design has this wording: "Ihr seid doch alle aus Musik geboren." A motto of broader import is quoted from Edward MacDowell on a recent design: "There is only one art—and that is the correlation of them all."

The musician must necessarily have many books, and it is probably true that he has a greater affection for them than people in other walks of life have for the libraries that accumulate

on their shelves with little or no purpose. By that token he should take special pride in labelling his volumes with a book-plate that will give them a distinctive personal touch, and at the same time secure them against loss at the hands of forgetful book borrowers. That some noted musicians, as well as many music-lovers, have adopted this delightful method of book identification, this essay has shown. That others would adopt it when they read of its peculiar virtues, was the firm conviction of the writer when he brought together the material for the essay. May you, reader, if you combine in one person the traits of the real music-lover and of the true book-lover, come to enjoy that peculiar sense of pride in possession which only the musical book-plate can afford.